

Anti-Gay Bullying Public Service Announcement
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In many schools students are harassed and attacked for many things; height, weight, looks, special needs, hobbies, academic achievements, and the list goes on. One of the biggest bullying issues on the rise is being bullied based on sexual orientation and gender expression. Some of the biggest headlines on news websites and television stations are the rising number of teen suicides based on gay bullying. What exactly is going on in schools towards anti-gay bullying?

In a research article published by GLSEN, data was gathered based on middle school students and statistics with bullying based on sexual orientation and gender expression. Many middle school students that participated in this research reported on harassment, school safety, and personal safety.

Many times when walking through the hall or allowing students to work on class work or projects together phrases such as “You’re so gay,” or “Faggot,” are thrown through the air as if they mean nothing. When these terms are used in a derogatory and negative way these remarks can often hurt those around them. Just who is listening? The girl who is too afraid to come out because she is afraid of what others will say? The boy who has already been rejected by his father for his sexual orientation and feels school is the only safe place because no one knows about him? These terms can be hurtful to others and make them feel as if their life style is wrong. Students who participated in this research reported that 91% had heard these terms used in a derogatory way by other students and 63% heard these terms used in a derogatory way by school staff. If staff is partaking in these acts then what are they doing to stop the derogatory comments? It was reported in this research that only 16% of staff intervene when derogatory remarks are made about homosexual students. This number is unacceptable and it doesn’t just stop at derogatory terms. Many homosexual students are also verbally harassed and physically harassed because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. As a result of very little teacher intervention, most students never tell school officials about the verbal and physical abuse. The harassment has also even lead as far as physical assault, such as being punched, kicked, and sometimes the use of a weapon.

Due to the lack of intervention by teachers students start to feel unsafe at school, a place where they should feel safe if they cannot feel safe at home or even in the outside world. School should be a safe zone for all students regardless of ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, or learning ability. To many students school is not safe when teachers are not helping with the bullying. This causes a negative affect on students’ ability to attend classes and school. Students are not going to put themselves in an uncomfortable or unsafe situation if they don’t have to. This then results in a drop in student GPA.

What starts out as derogatory terms that go untouched quickly begins to snowball into skipping school, dropping GPA’s, and even students bringing weapons to school or taking their own lives. According to the *2002 report by Public Health – Seattle & King County: **Bullying and Biased-Based Harassment in King County Schools***, students who are harassed because of their gender are 2 times more likely to bring a weapon such as a gun into a school building and 2 times more likely to attempt suicide. Bringing a weapon

to school increases to 4 times more likely for students who are alleged to be gay or lesbian and attempting suicide increases by 3 times.

What can be done for the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (or LGBT) population at schools to help stop bullying and decrease what are quickly becoming new statistics for suicide? Schools need to create a safe environment for all students. This largely falls on the role of school staff. When derogatory comments are being made staff need to start stepping in to stop the harassment before it grows into something more. Schools can also put anti-harassment policies into effect that are specific to sexual orientation and gender expression. If some staff feel uncomfortable with the issues of homosexuality they could also attend training and help the school create a variety of informational resources. Based on information from the *2002 report by Public Health – Seattle & King County: **Bullying and Biased-Based Harassment in King County Schools***, anti-discrimination laws has reduced suicides among Caucasian males by 29.1 per million. They have also stated that when schools have a Gay-Straight Alliance or other clubs it positively impacts many areas of students lives such as academic performance, personal comfort with orientation, safety, ability to contribute to society, and relationships between school, family, and society.

It is asked of you as an educator, a mentor, a hero, a teacher, an adult, a principal, to do everything you can to help create a safe school environment for homosexual students just as you would for heterosexual students. If you hear a derogatory term in the hallway or your classroom don't just let it go by as if it was unheard, because you don't know who is listening and how they are feeling. Help your school create clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliance and obtain an array of informational materials about homosexuality as a way of life, in history, in education, and in society that will positively affect students whether they are straight, gay, lesbian, transgender, or bisexual. Everyone deserves an equal chance at an education and life. Don't let one comment in the hallway decide the fate of a student who is struggling with their identity. Reach out your hand and help them.

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